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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a project that examined the six national education goals established by the National Governor's Association in 1990 and then included in the Goals 2000 Educate America Act. As part of a graduate seminar, 20 classroom teachers and 1 student teacher undertook to determine if these goals were attainable and how they could best be achieved. Each teacher chose to examine a goal in which he or she possessed expertise, and then worked with colleagues to examine the goal and make it workable. The six goals are presented first in the form developed by the governors, then in the form proposed by the project participants. The proposals made by the teachers rejected what they considered overgeneralized or unrealistic, such as the deadline of the year 2000. The teachers were willing to be held accountable for their students, recognized the need for and were involved in the educational change, had high expectations of themselves and their learners, and placed a high value on being contributing members of society. They stressed a desire to work with others to help their students achieve success in the classroom and in life, and they wanted to be included in decisions that had the potential to impact their classrooms. (ND)

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Teachers Look at Goals 2000

by Theresa M. Stahler

Background and purpose

A seminar for classroom teachers provided an opportunity to examine the National Goals initiated under the Reagan Administration and promoted through both the Bush and Clinton presidencies.

The teachers were enrolled in a graduate course, *Social Implications of American Education*. The objectives of the course were to: recognize the relationships that prevail between school and society; understand the cause of social change and the effects of such change; survey the historical relationship between schools and the societies that they serve; identify educational opportunities and challenges in the community; investigate the relationship between sociometric status of the learner and academic achievement; evaluate reform movements that address issues and problems in schools; identify and explore the role of the teacher in society; and develop strategies to confront the problems that are encountered in the classroom.

To meet the objectives of the course, these classroom teachers decided to seek the national perspective on education. Was there a national viewpoint? The Goals 2000 Educate America Act represented a national viewpoint on education. A 1989 Education Summit at Charlottesville led to the establishment of six national goals. The then President Bush stated, "Until now, we've treated education like a manufacturing process, assuming that if the gauges seemed right, if we had good pay scales, the right pupil - teacher ratios, good students would just pop out of our schools. It's time to turn things around - to focus on students, to set standards for our schools- and let teachers and principals figure out how best to meet them" (Remarks by the President at Presentation of National Education Strategy, April 18, 1991). For the first time an American president announced a set of national goals for education, these goals were to be achieved by the year 2000. The goals were established as a collaborative effort between the Bush administration and the National Governor's Association. Six goals were agreed upon by these two political groups. The goals, stated simply, are: (1) All children will start school ready to learn; (2) high school graduation rate will be at least 90%; (3) students will demonstrate competence in critical subjects; (4) U.S. students will be the first in the world in mathematics and science achievement; (5) every adult will be literate and have skills to compete in the economy; (6) schools will be free of drugs and violence.

Educators were not involved in formulating these goals. President Bush was represented at the discussions with the governors by Roger Porter, the President's domestic policy adviser. Before serving as a presidential advisor, Porter acted as executive secretary of the Economic Policy Board. Porter had no experience in public education (Spring, 1991).

Spring (1991) offered these reasons for the initial lack of involvement of teachers in

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the discussions and development of national goals. The two teacher unions, The National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers primarily support candidates from the Democratic party. In the past twenty years, both unions have supported the Democratic presidential candidate. Considering these conditions, it is unlikely that the republican president would work closely with teachers.
The governors also had reasons to exclude teachers from the reform agenda. Govenors have made educational reform a central theme in their political agendas. These government mandated reform efforts have put the the governors in many states in conflict with teacher unions and educational leaders. As the governors seek to use education to gain recognition, they are unlikely to include teachers as experts but rather wish to be recognized themselves as experts in education. For these political reasons, the initial development of the Goals did not include teacher recommendations.

A central purpose of the National Goals was to enable the country to compete in international trade. The concern of the politicians with international economic competition is consistent with the belief that national security, social stability and national prosperity are tied to educational success.

President Clinton continued this theme on March 31, 1994 while signing his name to the Goals 2000 Educate American Act. He stated "This is the beginning. It is the foundation. Today we can say America is serious about education." This legislation followed up on Clinton's work as governor of Arkansas. In that role, he had worked with the then governor of South Carolina and his current Secretary of Education, Richard Riley, to help formulate the educational goals of the National Governor's Association which President Bush then endorsed. The Goals 2000 Educate America Act contains the six original goals established by the governors in 1989 and two additional goals. The additional goals are to improve teacher education and increase parental involvement in schools. Now the goals had become national legislation, but missing still was the involvement by teachers.

The Goals 2000 Educate America Act provides federal money to states which comply with the initiatives dictates by the federal government. The Act provides federal grants to states which develop plans that meet the standards dictated by Goals. When national standards are adopted by the state, the state will be awarded money to carry out the standards.

Historically, the federal and state governments have directed the course of education in this country. Teacher involvement is an important component of this direction. THis past summer twenty one teachers had the opportunity to examine and discuss these Goals 2000. The following summarizes their input about these Goals.

Methodology and Goals

Twenty classroom teachers and one student teacher accepted the challenge of trying to determine if these goals were attainable and then decide how the goals could best be achieved. The teachers had between 1 and 20 years of experience in the classroom. All but one of the teachers taught in Pennsylvania, the outlier being a New Jersey teacher. One third of the teachers was also a parent of a school aged child. These teachers represented urban, suburban and rural schools. They taught elementary school, middle school, and high school learners. They were committed to improving schools and concerned with the quality of life of the learners in their classrooms. These teachers had heard of National Goals. They had not taken these Goals seriously, considering them the rhetoric of politicians. They examined the goals with mild interest, initially. but during discussion more serious interest and a feeling that the Goals could result in better schools and more responsive learners emerged. The teachers initial cynicism was replaced by a spirit of energy. These classroom instructors did not like their own cynicism and resolved to examine the goals judiciously in hopes of joining a national crusade to improve education in the United States. The President asked all Americans to "Take part in the crusade that counts the most -the crusade to prepare our children and ourselves for the exciting future that looms ahead." These teachers accepted this challenge.

Politicians have, historically, played an important part in the direction of schools in America. Examining the work done primarily by politicians would help the teachers to examine how closely their goals matched the goals established by the persons elected by the citizens of the United States. They believed that it will take all members of society - politicians, citizens, parents, teachers, and students - to improve student learning. The teachers worked in teams. Each teacher chose to examine a goal in which he or she possessed expertise then worked with colleagues to examine the goal and make it a workable goal.

Goal 1
The first goal proposed by the governors : All children will start school ready to learn.
The first goal proposed by classroom teachers:
All children in America will be provided the opportunities and experiences necessary to start school ready to learn.
This would include exposure to books, manipulative toys, literate adults and the opportunity to interact socially with their peers. To accomplish this, full funding of Head Start Programs for all eligible low income children will be provided. Preschool library programs will be available at all public schools and community libraries. All students will be strongly encouraged to attend a preschool program.

Goal 2
The governors' proposal; The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90%.
The teachers' proposal:
The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90%, and each

graduate will have the competency to be a contributing member of society.
Students will be able to contribute to the U.S. economy by holding a job and financially supporting themselves and /or their families. Schools can be restructured to allow nontraditional education in forms of vocational - technical education and internships with the opportunity to earn minimal amounts of money. The third option will be the traditional college-prep academic approach. After learning basic language arts, number skills, science, and social studies, the students will be given a choice as to which educational path they would like to pursue. Students will show their competency through a variety of methods. This will encourage students to stay in school and the graduation rate will improve.

Goal 3
The governors proposal: American students will leave grades four, eight, and twelve having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, history, and geography; and every school in America will ensure that all students lean to use their minds so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our modern economy.
The teachers' proposal:
American students will graduate from high school prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our modern economy based on their strengths.
American children are diverse. They come to our schools from different socioeconomic levels, cultures and family backgrounds. They bring to our schools their own unique experiences. Therefore some of our children will succeed in college. Others will contribute in both business and industry at many levels. Still others will contribute through the arts, music, and humanities using their unique talents. Not all children are capable of demonstrating competencies in <u>all</u> subjects. According to some researchers, learners display competencies in various ways. Upon graduation students should recognize their strengths and demonstrate the ability to use them to enrich and contribute to our society.

Goal 4
The governors' proposal: U.S. student will be first in the world in science and mathematics achievement.
The teachers' proposal:
U.S. students will become worldwide leaders in mathematics and science.
U. S. students will become worldwide leaders in mathematics and science using our own technology and resources. The process of learning will be at the heart of education, with proficiency in basic skills being the pathway to success.
Learners will meet basic mathematical proficiency requirements at certain grade levels. This may incorporate some type of standardized test taken by all U.S. students at a given grade level. Learners and teachers will become aware of new technologies and processes in math and science and incorporate these into class discussion and

learning processes. Learners will develop an understanding of ecology and how to better our environment. This would include the ability to offer solutions that improve the environment.

Goal 5
The governors' proposal:
Every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.
Teachers' proposal:
Every graduating American will be functionally literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in an ever changing global economy. Exercising the rights and responsibilities of citizenship should be not rest solely with schools but in partnership with business, community workers and government offices.

Goal 6
Governors proposal:
Every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.
Teachers proposal:
Learners will be taught how to make healthy and informed choices especially related to drugs and to resolve conflict in peaceful and productive ways.
The full service school will be a central institution in the community to coordinate needed service for children, adolescents, adults, and senior citizens within the community. The curriculum will include life skills, such as decision making and conflict resolution so that individuals understand the consequences, both short and long term, of their choices.

Conclusions and Implications

The teachers expressed general concerns. They eliminated "all" and "every," words that were all inclusive or overgeneralized. "When you are working with students, you learn not to use absolutes." The teachers did not want boundaries. The year 2000 was not a realistic goal. "in education we are not looking for quick fixes but for changes that will be long lasting." The teachers wanted to talk about the moral fiber that needed to be woven in the lives of each of their learners. This must be weaved by all members of society. The teachers willingly and eagerly assumed their part in achieving these national goals. These teachers made it clear that (1) they were willing to be held accountable for their learners, (2) they recognized the need and were involved in changing aspects of teaching and learning , (3) they have high expectations for themselves and their learners, (4) They place a high value on being contributing members of society.

The teachers repeatedly expressed a desire to work with caring members of society to

help their students achieve success in the classroom and in life. The teachers did not view the political agenda as intrusive but wanted to be included in decisions that had the potential to impact their classrooms.

This exercise demonstrated that teachers have the energy and the knowledge to improve classrooms. Their suggestions must be implemented in classrooms to improve schools and society.

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